

Policy Proposal under District Policy 208

Review and Amendment of Policy 466 — Professional Development and Mentoring

Dear Superintendent Peterson and Members of the Mankato Area Public Schools Policy Committee:

Pursuant to **District Policy 208**, Sections III.C and IV.A, I am submitting the following proposed review and amendment of **District Policy 466, Professional Development and Mentoring**.

Background

I received a constituent concern regarding the March 9, 2026, report published by Defending Education. The report identified Mankato Area Public Schools as one of the Minnesota school districts whose professional-development policies contain provisions authorizing race-specific financial incentives, affinity groups, mentoring programs, or other employment-related support.

As a community member, prior to my election to the school board, I spoke during public comment when provisions allowing race-based differentiation in staff development, mentoring and related incentives were under consideration. I advocated that our policies should support all educators and students equally, without regard to race or ethnicity. My position then, as now, is that professional opportunities, stipends, mentoring and retention supports should be based on objectives and job related criteria available to all similarly situated employees. The concerns I raised at that time remain relevant to the current language in Policy 466, Section V.D.

MAPS Policy 466, Section V.D, currently provides that district funds (including staff-development revenue or “another funding source”) may be used for:

1. Additional stipends as incentives to mentors of color or who are American Indian;
2. Financial supports for professional learning community affinity groups for teachers from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups;
3. Programs for induction aligned with the mentorship program, especially for teachers from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups; and
4. Grants supporting professional development related to increasing student achievement for students of color and American Indian students.

This language is similar to provisions in Minnesota Statutes section 122A.70 and related sections. However, federal **Title VII** prohibits race discrimination in compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment and specifically in access to employer training programs. The Minnesota Human Rights Act contains parallel protections.

Requested Review and Action

I request that the administration:

5. **Obtain a written legal opinion** regarding whether each provision of Policy 466, Section V.D, complies with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Equal Protection Clause, the Minnesota Human Rights Act, Minnesota Statutes sections 122A.70, 124D.861, and 124D.862, and any applicable conditions attached to state or federal grants.
6. **Provide the Board with an operational report** identifying:
 - Whether the district has implemented any of the provisions in Section V.D;
 - The funding source(s) and amounts spent on each initiative;
 - The eligibility requirements used;
 - Whether stipends, grants, leave protections, placements, or professional-development opportunities have differed according to an employee's race or ethnicity; and
 - Whether the district currently receives any grants requiring these provisions.
7. **Return Policy 466 to the School Board for a first reading** after the legal and operational reviews are completed.
8. **Replace race-based employee eligibility criteria with objective, job-related criteria**, except where a specific grant legally requires narrower eligibility and district legal counsel confirms that the grant may be implemented consistently with applicable law.

Proposed Replacement for Section V.D

The following language is proposed to replace the current Section V.D in its entirety:

D. Mentoring, professional-development, and retention initiatives

The school district may use staff-development revenue, special grant funds established by the legislature, or another lawful funding source to provide mentor stipends and support mentorship, induction, professional learning communities, professional development, and employee-retention initiatives.

Eligibility, participation, compensation, and other employment benefits provided under this section shall be determined through objective and job-related criteria, including professional experience, years of service, license-shortage areas, identified professional needs, mentoring responsibilities, and documented district staffing needs.

Except when expressly required by a specific law or restricted grant and determined by district legal counsel to comply with applicable federal and state law, no employee shall receive or be denied compensation, professional-development opportunities, training, mentoring, leave protection, placement, or another employment benefit because of the employee's race, color, ethnicity, or national origin.

Nothing in this section prevents the district from offering professional development designed to help staff improve achievement and educational opportunities for student populations identified through district data, provided that employee access to such professional development is administered consistently with applicable nondiscrimination laws.

Before accepting or implementing a grant containing race-conscious employee eligibility requirements, the administration shall inform the School Board of the requirements, funding amount, duration, and legal basis for the program.

The current enumerated provisions in Section V.D and any related race-specific retention or placement language would be deleted and replaced with the above.

Why This Approach

This proposal allows the district to obtain clear legal guidance, understand current operations and funding, and maintain strong mentoring and professional-development programs through objective criteria available to all similarly situated employees. Hastings Public Schools' Policy 425 provides a useful model that retains mentor stipend authority without the race-specific provisions.

If the Board ultimately amends Policy 466 to remove the race-based language, a logical follow-up would be to notify [Defending Education](#) of the change and request removal from its documentation.

I request that this proposal be reviewed by the Superintendent pursuant to Policy 208 and, placed on a future Board agenda for discussion and action. I am available to provide additional information or discuss this matter further.

Thank you for your service to the Mankato community.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Hanke
Mankato, Minnesota
507-351-3367

Also Attached is Hastings Public Schools' Policy 425